

## PHL 456: Topics in Feminist Philosophy (Fall 2013)

### Feminist Standpoints: Consciousness, Embodiment, and Transformation

Mon. and Weds, 3:00 – 4:50 p.m. (112A Berkey Hall)

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### Course Aims and Purposes

Over the years, feminist philosophers and social theorists have raised important questions about the relationship between knowledge, power, oppression, and resistance: Specifically, feminists have asked how one's position in a social structure--such as class, race, and gender--can affect what one is able to *know* about that structure and about the power relations in society more generally. Does being a member of an oppressed group always limit one's ability to know, or are there ways in which oppressed persons have access to forms of knowledge not typically available to members of dominant groups? Without romanticizing the position of oppressed persons, feminist standpoint theorists explore the ways in which theorizing from a position of marginality can lead to certain insights about structures of power.

In this course, we will read a variety of writings that explore the connections between knowledge, power, oppression, and embodiment. While not all of the writers embrace the label of "feminist standpoint theorist," they all examine the ways in which women's position as women--or specifically as feminists--affects their understandings of themselves and the world. We will consider various aspects of women's experience as sources of feminist consciousness, such as women's experiences as workers, as caregivers, and as embodied beings. While early feminist standpoint theorists paid only minimal attention to the ways that one's racial and class position affect one's experience as a woman, later feminist standpoint theorists have attempted to address the issue of intersectionality. Thus, we will study the ways in which race and class analyses complicate feminist standpoint theory. Does standpoint theory presuppose a unity of experience, or a form of "identity politics" that is homogenizing and problematic for feminist theory and activism? What possibilities for change and resistance arise out of standpoint theory? Finally, in the last few weeks of the course, we will return to questions about women's embodiment, with a specific focus on sexuality and on the problem of sexual objectification, which has been the center of much feminist attention in recent year.

Students are expected to have some background in feminist theory, though I hope and anticipate that students' various disciplinary backgrounds will greatly enrich the course.

### Required Texts

The two books have been ordered at the Student Book Store (421 E. Grand River, 351-4210), and the coursepack will be available only at Budget Printing (974 Trowbridge, 351-5060).

- Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2004)
- Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Coursepack (available at Budget Printing)

## Course Requirements and Evaluation

Course requirements include two papers on assigned topics (4-5 pages each); a presentation/paper (4-5 pages), a term paper (8-10 pages), and daily “critical question assignments.” Each of these is explained below.

**Grades** will be calculated as follows:

Short Paper #1 (due Oct. 2)	20%
Short Paper #2 (due Oct. 30)	20%
Presentation Paper	20%
Term Paper (due Dec. 4)	30%
Critical Question Assignments (see below)	10%

### Short Papers #1 and #2

I will distribute suggested paper topics for the two regularly scheduled short papers. You are welcome to construct your own paper topics, but you need to have your topic approved by me at least one week before the paper is due. The purpose of the short papers is to demonstrate a critical engagement with the readings and with the issues and problems discussed in class.

### Presentation/Short Paper

Early in the semester, each student will sign up to do an in-class oral presentation, which will focus on some aspect of one of the topic sections listed on the syllabus (these are the bold headings on the course schedule below). The oral presentation should present to the class an argument or question that relates to the issues being discussed in that section of the course, but it must not focus on the assigned readings. Instead, you are expected to do independent research on the topic and to present on some aspect of the work that others have done in this area. Although I am happy to discuss your ideas with you and offer suggestions, you should also look at the books and articles listed in the references and footnotes (as well as at those mentioned in the text) of the readings on that section of the syllabus.

Although the presentation itself is not graded, you are required to do one, and it must meet the criteria specified here. An inadequate presentation will lower the grade of your “presentation paper.”

- Each presentation should be approximately 20 minutes, including some time (at least 5 minutes, but as much as 10-15 minutes) for discussion and questions from the class.
- Although you may bring notes, you should not read directly from them.
- You should present new ideas or material to the class, which will involve some explication of the additional reading/s that you did, but you must do more than merely summarize others’ arguments. Here are a few possible ideas:
  - Explain how the ideas expressed in the additional reading/s shed light on the topics covered in this section of the course and/or on other sections of the course.
  - What about the argument of the essay/s you read do you agree/disagree with?
  - Present some discussion questions to the class about the issues that you’ve raised.

The week after your presentation, I will give you written feedback that you should take into account when you write your “presentation paper,” which is due two weeks from the day you did the presentation. The presentation paper must relate to the presentation, though you are welcome to revise, expand on, or more narrowly focus the ideas developed in the presentation. Keep in mind that the paper must have a thesis that you defend (it must be an argumentative essay).

## Term Paper

Term papers should be approximately 8-10 pages (double-spaced, normal font) and are due on in class on December 4<sup>th</sup> (the last class meeting). Although your paper should address an issue or question covered in the course readings and/or discussions, it should also include some independent research. While it is fine for you to build on the work that you did for the presentation, you must do at least some additional research for the term paper. It is also okay for you to work on an entirely new topic, or for you to work further on developing the argument you made in Paper #1 or #2 (as long as you do some additional research).

By Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, you must submit a brief (no longer than 1 page) prospectus for my feedback and approval, including a list of sources--a preliminary bibliography--that you plan to use in your term paper. I will meet with each student in my office on Weds., Nov. 20<sup>th</sup> for 10-15 minutes each, to discuss your ideas for the final paper. The prospectus and meeting are mandatory—not turning one in on time will result in a .5 reduction of your grade on the term paper.

## Critical Question Assignments (CQA)

Students are expected to bring a Critical Question Assignment (CQA) with them to each class period. The CQA must be typed and should be about ½ page in length (one paragraph). It should demonstrate to me that you have critically engaged the reading material (I will assume that you have done the reading; the point of the CQA is not to demonstrate that.) Because the CQA's will also be used as a basis for our class discussions, it might be helpful when writing them to ask yourself, "What question did this reading raise for me that I think it would interesting to discuss in class?"

Here are some general ideas for writing CQA's:

- Pose a question that the author didn't raise but that seems relevant to the issue being discussed. Briefly explain why you think this question is important and how it connects to the material.
- Offer an objection to the author's argument that she/he does not address.
- State something about the article that you found unclear or confusing and explain why this point seems important (in other words, why must we try to clear up this confusion?)
- Briefly consider how the essay connects to other articles or topics that we've discussed.

Although I will collect these during each class and return them the following week, I will not write many comments on them (since we will be discussing them in class). Each CQA will be graded as either acceptable (check) or unacceptable (zero). Your total CQA grade, which is 10% of your final course grade, will be calculated as follows.

18-24 checks:	4.0
16-17 .....	3.5
14-15 .....	3.0
12-13 .....	2.5
10-11 .....	2.0
8-9 .....	1.5
6-7 .....	1.0
0-5 .....	0.0

Keep in mind that there are 24 class days in which readings will be discussed--which means that you have 24 opportunities to turn in a CQA--and you will be able to miss 6 of them without being penalized. No CQA's will be accepted late (unless your absence is officially excused).

## Other Important Information

**Attendance/Participation:** This course will be run much like a seminar, with your comments, questions, and reactions to the readings guiding much of our classroom discussion. Thus, I expect you to come to class prepared, with the readings done and with specific questions you'd like to discuss. Poor attendance and failure to participate in class discussions will count against you in cases where your final grade is borderline; active, engaged, and thoughtful participation could help raise your grade in such cases.

**Late Policy:** All papers must be turned in at the start of class on the day that they are due. For any papers submitted late, your grade on that paper will be reduced by .5 (on a 4.0 scale) for each 24-hour period that it is late. The only exceptions to this are in the case of unusual circumstances, which must be documented, and where the student makes arrangements with me before the assignment is due, whenever possible.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism:** Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism can result in a failing grade in this course. The following are some general examples of plagiarism:

- copying without quotation marks
- paraphrasing someone else's writing without acknowledgment
- using someone else's facts or ideas without citing your source(s)

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for People with Disabilities [353-9642 or 355-1293(TTY)] at the beginning of the semester to develop reasonable accommodations. Please notify me if you have any special requirements or needs of which I should be aware.

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## Course Schedule

As the semester progresses, I may make some minor changes in this schedule; these will be announced in class. Please remember to bring your coursepack and/or books with you to class each day. In the list below, the books and coursepack are abbreviated as follows:

[FST] = *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (ed., Harding)

[OFB] = *On Female Body Experience* (Young)

[CP] = Coursepack

### Introduction to Feminist Standpoint Theory

W 8/28 Introduction to Course

M 9/2 **Labor Day – No Class**

W 9/4 Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate" [FST]

Jaggar, "Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women" [FST]

M 9/9 Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology" [FST]

Collins, "Learning from the Other Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought" [FST]

### **Marginality, Oppositional Consciousness, and Coalition Across Difference**

- W 9/11 Collins, "Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment [CP]  
hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space for Radical Openness" [FST]  
Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Differential  
Oppositional Consciousness" [FST]
- M 9/16 Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception" [CP]  
Kruks, "Phenomenology and Difference: On the Possibility of Feminist 'World  
Traveling'" [CP]

### **Labor, Work, and Sexuality as Sources of Feminist Consciousness**

- W 9/18 Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist'  
Age" [CP]  
Weeks, "Labor, Standpoints, and Feminist Subjects" [FST]
- M 9/23 MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Towards Feminist  
Jurisprudence" [FST]  
MacKinnon, "Unequal Sex: A Sex Equality Approach to Sexual Assault" [CP]

### **Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Antiglobalization Struggles**

- W 9/25 Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" [CP]
- M 9/30 Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist  
Struggles" [CP]  
Mies and Shiva, "The Subsistence Perspective" [FST]

### **Maternal Thinking and the Experience of Caring for Dependents**

- W 10/2 **Short Paper #1 Due**  
Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking as a Feminist Standpoint" [FST]  
Ruddick, "Notes Toward a Feminist Maternal Peace Politics" [CP]
- M 10/7 Bubeck, "Justice and the Labor of Care" [CP]  
Young, "Autonomy, Welfare Reform, and Meaningful Work" [CP]

### **Women's Embodied Experience and Feminism**

- W 10/9 Young, Introduction to *On Female Body Experience* [OFB]  
Young, "Lived Body vs. Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity" [OFB]  
Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment,  
Motility, and Spatiality" [OFB]
- M 10/14 Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" [OFB]
- W 10/16 Young, "Women Recovering Our Clothes" [OFB]  
Young, "Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling" [OFB]
- M 10/21 **Reading Day – No Class**
- W 10/23 Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme" [OFB]

### **Consciousness, Feminist Method, and “Strong Objectivity”**

- M 10/28 MacKinnon, “Consciousness Raising” [CP]  
MacKinnon, “Method and Politics” [CP]
- W 10/30 **Short Paper #2 Due**  
Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is ‘Strong Objectivity’?” [FST]  
Harding, “Reinventing Ourselves as Other: More New Agents of History and Knowledge” [CP]

### **Reason, Emotion, and Feminist Transformation**

- M 11/4 Babbitt, “Transformation Experiences and Rational Deliberation” [CP]  
Babbitt, “Reason and the Erotic: The Moral Significance of Personal Relations and Commitments” [CP]

### **Essentialism and Generalization: The Category of Women**

- W 11/6 Frye, “Ethnocentrism/Essentialism: The Failure of an Ontological Cure” [CP]  
Heyes, “Feminist Method and Generalizing about Women” [CP]

### **Challenges, Controversies, and Revisions to Standpoint Theory**

- M 11/11 Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist” [FST]  
Hekman, “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited” [FST]

### **Sexuality, Embodiment, and Objectification**

- W 11/13 Lemoncheck, “What’s Wrong with Being a Sex Object?” [CP]  
Nussbaum, “Objectification” [CP]  
Cahill, “Preface” [CP]
- M 11/18 **Prospectus for Term Paper Due**  
Cahill, “Troubling Objectification” [CP]  
Cahill, “Derivatization” [CP]
- W 11/20 **Mandatory Conferences with Professor (No regular class meeting)**
- M 11/25 Cahill, “Masculine Sex Objects” [CP]  
Cahill, “Unsexed Women” [CP]
- W 11/27 **No Class – Reading Day**
- M 12/2 Cahill, “Objectification and/in Sex Work” [CP]  
Cahill, “Sexual Violence and Objectification” [CP]  
Cahill, “Conclusion: Feeling Bodies” [CP]
- W 12/4 **Term Papers Due**  
Wrap-Up

There will be no class during finals week.